UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.17/1996/14
26 February 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
Fourth session
18 April-3 May 1996

Promoting education, public awareness and training

Report of the Secretary-General

CONTENTS

		Paragraphs	Page
INTRODUCTION		1 - 4	2
I.	CURRENT STATUS AND PROGRESS SINCE THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT	5 - 11	2
II.	CONSTRAINTS TO IMPLEMENTATION	12 - 19	4
III.	MAIN TRENDS	20	5
IV.	LINKAGES WITH OTHER CHAPTERS OF AGENDA 21	21	6
V.	MAIN POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	22	6
VI.	ACTION REQUIRED	23	7

96-04100 (E) 250396 260396

/...

INTRODUCTION

1. Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 (Promoting education, public awareness and training) is a cross-sectoral chapter. At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), there was unanimous agreement among developed and developing countries alike that education was critical for promoting sustainable development and increasing the capacity of the people to address environment and development issues. 1/ Unlike many other chapters of Agenda 21, chapter 36 is both virtually non-contentious and applicable to all countries. But although support for chapter 36 is strong, it could become the forgotten priority of UNCED.

2. The scope of chapter 36 is extremely broad, ranging from formal education systems at all levels, vocational training and development of the workforce to education in agriculture, adult education, and non-formal education and communication about environment and development. Chapter 36 also emphasizes that basic education as defined at the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, March 1990) is a prerequisite to environmental and development education, and remains a priority for many countries of the world, that is, linked to the overall effort to combat poverty.

3. Chapter 36 is divided into three programme areas: (a) "Reorienting education towards sustainable development"; (b) Increasing public awareness"; and (c) "Promoting training".

4. The present report and its addendum were prepared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as task manager for chapter 36, with input from sources inside and outside the United Nations system.

I. CURRENT STATUS AND PROGRESS SINCE THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

5. The importance accorded to education in Agenda 21 has been reaffirmed, broadened and deepened within the new international consensus and framework for action emerging from the series of international conferences organized by the United Nations after UNCED. 2/

6. It is important to note that the theme "Education, public awareness and training" is one of the few themes for which explicit recommendations appear in the action plans for each of the conferences in the above-mentioned series, as well as in the Convention on biological diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and or Desertification, particularly in Africa. Implementation of chapter 36 of Agenda 21 therefore needs to be integrated with the implementation of analogous recommendations within the other action frameworks.

7. At the heart of this new international consensus is a new vision of the theme "Education, public awareness and training" as the essential underpinning

for sustainable development, a linchpin to support advances in other spheres, such as science, technology, legislation and production.

8. Education is no longer seen as an objective in and of itself but as a means to:

(a) Bring about the changes in values, behaviour and lifestyle that are needed to achieve sustainable development, and ultimately democracy, human security and peace;

(b) Disseminate the knowledge, know-how and skills that are needed to bring about sustainable production and consumption patterns and to improve the management of natural resources, agriculture, energy and industrial production;

(c) Ensure an informed populace that is prepared to support changes towards sustainability emerging from different sectors.

9. As to formal education, the implementation of the recommendations contained in chapter 36 to reorient education towards sustainable development coincides with a broad rethinking within many countries of their formal education systems, which are no longer considered adequate to meeting the needs of society and the workplace. Traditionally, education has been designed largely to pass on existing knowledge, skills and values. Today, education is being redesigned in terms of how to prepare people for life: for job security; the demands of a rapidly changing society; technological changes that now directly or indirectly affect every part of life; and, ultimately, the quest for happiness and well-being and quality of life. Education is therefore being redefined as a lifelong process that needs to be not merely readjusted but restructured and reformed according to new requirements. One such requirement is the goal of sustainable development, an overarching concept that has broad implications for curricula at all levels of education.

10. Since UNCED and the above-mentioned series of major international conferences, there has been ever greater recognition within all sectors of society that the fuel that will drive changes towards sustainable development will be public understanding. Therefore, greater emphasis is now placed on public awareness and beyond that on public action: a new understanding needs to be inculcated among people in all countries, of all ages and in all walks of life. This is a formidable challenge that will profoundly affect progress in implementing all other areas of Agenda 21.

11. Since UNCED, a number of events and studies have taken place that provide an overview and evaluation of the status of environmental and development education and directions for future work. These are described in detail in an addendum to the present report (E/CN.17/1996/14/Add.1); the attention of the Commission is drawn in particular to:

(a) The International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, chaired by Jacques Delors and established by UNESCO to formulate suggestions and recommendations (to be published in April 1996) for policy makers and officials at the highest levels. The work of the

International Commission incorporates education for sustainable development, and therefore provides the broad context for implementation of chapter 36;

(b) An inter-sessional workshop on the theme "Education and public awareness for sustainable development" (Prague, 28 November-1 December 1995), organized by the Czech Republic in cooperation with UNESCO and the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat, which formulated recommendations on the implementation of chapter 36 for consideration by the Commission at its fourth session.

II. CONSTRAINTS TO IMPLEMENTATION

12. The challenge after UNCED has been to translate into action the ambitious recommendations agreed upon by participating Governments. The vast scope of chapter 36, targeting people of all ages in all countries, constitutes in itself an impediment to implementation, suggesting the following questions: Where do we begin? What are the priorities? How can results be achieved quickly? And how can the numerous priority target groups, namely decision makers, youth, women and non-governmental organizations, be reached adequately? Nevertheless, the broad scope of the chapter is essential for addressing the complex issue of sustainability.

13. The theme "Education for sustainable development" is still an emerging concept that needs to be clarified at the national and international levels, a lengthy process that must involve all stakeholders. The theme "Environmental education", which emerged after the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972), and focused primarily on the environment and its protection, is seen as an important part of education for sustainable development but not its equivalent. The concepts of human development, social development and economic development need to be integrated with environmental concerns in a holistic, interdisciplinary conceptual framework, which is now increasingly referred to as "Education for sustainable development". The challenge, therefore, is far broader and deeper than the mere conversion of environmental education to education for sustainable development.

14. There is also uncertainty and sometimes confusion concerning the content of the theme "Education for sustainable development". What are its key messages? Which messages have universal validity? How can its core ideas be communicated to people who in order to be motivated to effect change must grasp complex global concepts in terms that relate to the reality of their experience in their communities and in their daily lives? What is the best way to communicate such concepts as interconnectedness, complexity, the whole Earth system and other basic notions related to sustainability, concepts that can seem overwhelming to many?

15. The gap between science and education compounds the difficulty of clarifying the content of education for sustainable development. The new understanding of this concept needs to be based on interdisciplinary, accurate, up-to-date and unbiased information, which is slow to move from the realm of academics and experts to the non-specialist users of such information.

16. The integration of sustainable development into formal education systems is also hampered by the lack of planners, teachers, and administrators that are trained in interdisciplinary approaches in general and in environment and development issues in particular.

17. While restructuring and reform of educational systems, coupled with pre- and in-service teacher training, offer the best prospects in the long run, the time required for such change needs to be taken into consideration, together with the budget restrictions that are prevalent in most countries today.

18. Training at all levels will be essential to change production and consumption patterns, transfer environmentally sound technologies, alleviate poverty and achieve full employment. The restructuring and globalization of the world economy will also require a flexible and adaptable workforce. Despite the progress that has been achieved in this area, much more will be required.

19. Finally, the political will needed to successfully reorient education, public awareness and training towards sustainable development is still lacking. The kinds of changes that are required will occur only if Governments, as well as society as a whole, give priority to reorienting education, a priority that is translated in concrete terms into the necessary financial investments. In most countries, although education is recognized by all as fundamental to building a viable future for humankind it is still low on the political agenda. Education thus risks becoming the forgotten priority in terms of concrete action, in the follow-up not only to UNCED but also to all the other international conferences and instruments mentioned above.

III. MAIN TRENDS

20. The main trends that have emerged since UNCED in the area of education, public awareness and training are as follows:

(a) Numerous countries are undertaking sweeping educational reform efforts to start to integrate the notions of sustainable development;

(b) Public understanding as a basis for action is being given increasing priority. The role of the media is seen as critical in this regard;

(c) There is a consensus on the need to clarify the concept of education for sustainable development and its content. The universal messages of sustainable development need to be articulated in terms that the public can understand and that can be easily related to local situations and needs, as a basis for action by communities, households and individuals;

(d) The new communication technologies, where available, offer significant opportunities to convey these key messages world wide rapidly and inexpensively, reaching down to the grass-roots level and promoting dialogue and exchange of experience;

(e) Increasingly, non-governmental organizations are mobilizing and networking to become more effective channels for communicating information and understanding about sustainable development;

(f) New opportunities are unfolding to break down the traditional barriers between the educational community and other sectors, and to form new partnerships, in particular with business and industry;

(g) There is a broader appreciation of the need to adapt sustainable development thinking and education to local environmental, socio-economic and cultural contexts;

(h) Within the United Nations system, discussions have begun to develop a new initiative for joint action that will build in part on the 20 years of experience that have been acquired within the UNESCO/United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) International Environmental Education Programme (IEEP). This new cooperative arrangement will provide common elements in terms of content and methodology that could be applied and adapted by countries, major groups and local communities to further public understanding and action. Partners from outside the United Nations system could also be associated with this new action initiative.

IV. LINKAGES WITH OTHER CHAPTERS OF AGENDA 21

21. Chapter 36 (Education, raising of public awareness and training) is linked to virtually all other areas of Agenda 21. 3/ In the light of developments since UNCED, links between chapter 36 and the following chapters of Agenda 21 are particularly important: 3 (Combating poverty); 4 (Changing consumption patterns); 5 (Demographic dynamics and sustainability); 6 (Protecting and promoting human health); 8 (Integrating environment and development in decision-making); 37 (National mechanisms and international cooperation for capacity-building in developing countries); and 23-32 (all dealing with major groups).

V. MAIN POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

22. The following policy recommendations are proposed to Governments and civil society in general and the Commission in particular:

(a) National educational policies need to be rethought so that they may achieve the most fundamental goals of society, namely people-centred, equitable and sustainable development, and ultimately democracy and peace. Therefore, the revamping of education for sustainable development needs to involve all sectors of society and not merely the traditional educational community or elements within Governments and ministries of education;

(b) Translating into reality the new vision of the role of education and public understanding will require imagination and innovation. A dynamic process of reflection, experimentation and sharing of knowledge and experience needs to be encouraged at all levels;

(c) Education needs to become a lifelong process. In addition to schools, households should be made a key entry point in order to ensure that women and girls, as well as the large number of children who are not part of the formal education system, receive the benefits of education;

(d) Through primary education for all, in particular in the developing countries, some basic messages concerning environment and development can be transmitted;

(e) Greater emphasis needs to be given to the role of education, public awareness and training in changing wasteful consumption patterns and lifestyles;

(f) The increasing emphasis on raising awareness and taking action at the community and municipality levels needs to be reinforced;

(g) The content of educational and teaching materials needs to receive special attention in order to ensure scientific accuracy, a global perspective and interdisciplinarity;

(h) Scientists need to be closely associated with education, public awareness and training for sustainable development;

(i) The training of teachers and communicators of all kinds, including journalists, must be a priority;

(j) Greater attention needs to be given to the role of the media, the arts and religion;

(k) Business and industry, with their expertise, distribution infrastructures, marketing know-how and financial resources, need to be key actors and stand to be major beneficiaries of an environmentally literate workforce, informed consumers and citizens ready to support the imminent changes in production and consumption patterns.

VI. ACTION REQUIRED

23. The Commission on Sustainable Development may wish to make the following recommendations concerning action needed to improve the implementation of chapter 36:

(a) Governments, major groups and the United Nations system should promote a lifelong learning society by ensuring democratic access by all to education, information and learning materials;

(b) Governments, the United Nations system and major groups should promote an interdisciplinary approach and a broadening of the traditional objectives and scope of education and training, including a linking or integration of educational activities and budgets within different ministries, departments and other concerned entities;

(c) Governments, major groups and the United Nations system should develop an integrated approach to implementing chapter 36 of Agenda 21 in conjunction with other relevant chapters of Agenda 21, as well as with relevant sections of the action plans of the other recent major United Nations conferences (especially the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women), and of the above-mentioned conventions dealing with biological diversity, climate change and desertification;

(d) Governments, major groups and the United Nations system should give greater emphasis to education, public awareness and training within the work programme of the Commission under the programme "Changing production and consumption patterns", with particular emphasis on the subprogramme "Evaluating the effectiveness of policy measures intended to change consumption and production patterns, such as command-and-control, economic and social instruments, government procurement policies and guidelines". Particular attention should be paid to encouraging the adoption of sustainable consumption habits and lifestyles by individuals and households, through public awareness campaigns, education and community-based action;

(e) Governments, the United Nations system and the international financial institutions should seek to develop indicators and other statistical methods to measure the economic and social benefits of education, public awareness-building and training to society as a whole in order to pave the way for new policies and investments that will revamp formal and non-formal education;

(f) Investments in education and training made by both national and international institutions should reflect the real value and impact of education in achieving sustainable development by improving both socio-economic development and environmental conditions;

(g) Governments, major groups and the United Nations system should ensure that education programmes contribute to a better understanding of the need to internalize environmental costs and to gain public acceptance of such policy measures as environmental taxes;

(h) Governments, the media, and business and industry should work together to ensure through the media and the advertising industry that key messages about sustainable development are communicated to the public;

(i) Governments, major groups and the United Nations system should make full use of the new communications technologies to promote education, public awareness and training. Public-private partnerships should be encouraged in this regard;

(j) Governments should ensure that national committees or councils for sustainable development involve persons knowledgeable about education, public awareness and training. National action plans for sustainable development should ensure that the concerns of chapter 36 are well represented, and should draw on assistance, as appropriate, from the United Nations system;

(k) The United Nations system should be encouraged to develop a broad cooperative international initiative to promote education, public awareness and training for sustainable development, building on past experience, in particular that of the UNESCO-UNEP International Environmental Education Programme. This new cooperative arrangement should be bold and imaginative, and should concentrate on a limited number of key undertakings during the next four or five years;

(l) The United Nations system, in cooperation with major groups, should develop guidelines for education for sustainable development, and should thereby clarify the concept and its key messages;

(m) Given the essential role of education in its broadest sense for the future implementation of the whole of Agenda 21, the United Nations system should report to the Commission at its fifth session on progress made in implementing the present set of recommendations, to be considered in the context of the 1997 overall review of the implementation of Agenda 21.

Notes

1/ See Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), resolution 1, annex II, para. 36.3.

2/ Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April-6 May 1994; International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994; World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995; Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995; and United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), to be held in Istanbul from 3-14 June 1996.

3/ See Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development ..., para. 36.1.